

Date: 20 January 2016
For immediate release

SCHOOL PACKS CAN BE A PAIN IN THE BACK!

As children return to school this January, the Chiropractors' Association of Australia (CAA) Deputy President, Dr. Andrew Lawrence, would like to warn parents of the risks of long term spinal damage through incorrectly packed and fitted school backpacks.

An in-field observational study conducted by the Chiropractors' Association of Australia (CAA) of more than 340 school children on high-traffic school commute routes in late 2011, revealed 90% of school children have bad posture when carrying their bags which could result in spinal damage, while 75% are not using their backpack's ergonomic features to prevent such damage.

Dr Lawrence said, "Heavy weight carried in backpacks can cause muscle strain, irritation, negative postural changes and injury, which can lead to adult back pain and spinal disorders, particularly after carrying a heavily loaded backpack for twelve years or more of schooling. Many of the current bags children use may be fashionable, but unless they allow for even distribution across the back, they can cause tremendous discomfort."

Findings published in the *Australian Spine* journal revealed that the weight of the average backpack is often heavier, proportionally, than the legal load-bearing limit for adults. Another international study found that daily backpack carrying is a frequent cause of discomfort for school children. School backpacks were felt to be heavy by 79.1% of children, to cause fatigue by 65.7%, and to cause back pain by 46.1%¹.

School can be a challenging time for children, so ensuring they are as comfortable as possible is important for their physical and mental development. Below are some tips which will assist with this.

Tips for carrying heavy backpacks

- 1 Backpacks should be ideally no heavier than 10% of a student's weight when packed.
- 2 Make sure the backpack is sturdy and appropriately sized - no wider than the student's chest
- 3 Put comfort and fit at the top of the priority list, rather than good looks
- 4 Choose a backpack with broad, padded shoulder straps
- 5 Use both shoulder straps - never sling the pack over one shoulder
- 6 Use waist straps to bring weight close to the body so it supported by the trunk not the shoulders
- 7 Don't wear the backpack any lower than the hollow of the lower back
- 8 Don't overload the backpack - use school lockers and plan homework well in advance
- 9 Place all heavy items at the base of the pack, close to the spine, for a better distribution of the weight

Chiropak Backpack

The Chiropractors' Association of Australia (CAA) together with Spartan School Supplies and Macquarie University (NSW), joined forces to research and develop the 'Chiropak'. This durable, functional and comfortable backpack is proven to reduce the incidence and severity of neck and back pain associated with the carriage of heavy loads. Find out more about the Spartan Chiropak at www.bit.ly/CAACHiropak

Chiropractors are uniquely positioned to educate parents, teachers and students about spinal health care through their minimum five years university training. Each week, there are over 215,000 visits to Australian chiropractors for a broad range of reasons. Chiropractic care has been proven to be effective, and can restore correct function and relieve pain symptoms associated with the carrying of heavy backpacks.

– Ends –

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¹ Negrini, S., & Carabalona, R (2002). Backpacks on! Schoolchildren's Perceptions of Load, Associations with Back Pain and Factors Determining the Load. *Spine*, 27(2), 187-195